

Vietnam

Facts and Statistics

Location: Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, and South China Sea, alongside China, Laos, and Cambodia

Capital: Hanoi

Climate: tropical in south; monsoonal in north with hot, rainy season (mid-May to mid-September) and warm, dry season (mid-October to mid-March)

Population: 82,689,518 (July 2004 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Vietnamese 85%-90%, Chinese, Hmong, Thai, Khmer, Cham, various mountain groups

Religions: Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Christian (predominantly Roman Catholic, some Protestant), indigenous beliefs and Muslim

The Language

Vietnamese, Vietnam's official language, is a tonal language that can be compared to Cambodia's official language, Khmer. With each syllable, there are six different tones that can be used, which change the definition and it often makes it difficult for foreigners to pick up the language.

There are other languages spoken as well such as Chinese, Khmer, Cham and other languages spoken by tribes inhabiting the mountainous regions. Although there are some similarities to Southeast Asian languages, such as Chinese, Vietnamese is thought to be a separate language group, although a member of the Austro-Asiatic language family.

In written form, Vietnamese uses the Roman alphabet and accent marks to show tones. This system of writing called quoc ngu, was created by Catholic missionaries in the 17th century to translate the scriptures. Eventually this system, particularly after World War I, replaced one using Chinese characters (chu nom), which had been the unofficial written form used for centuries.

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Vietnamese Culture & Society

Confucianism

- o The teachings of Confucius influence the Vietnamese describe the position of the individual in Vietnamese society.
- o Confucianism is a system of behaviors and ethics that stress the obligations of people towards one another based upon their relationship.
- o The basic tenets are based upon five different relationships:
 - . Ruler and subject
 - . Husband and wife
 - . Parents and children
 - . Brothers and sisters
 - . Friend and friend
- o Confucianism stresses duty, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority, and sincerity.

The Family

- o Vietnamese life revolves around the family.
- o The Vietnamese family consists of the nuclear as well as the extended family.

- o It is not uncommon for three generations to be living together under one roof.
- o In Confucian tradition, the father is the head of the family and it is his responsibility to provide food, clothing and shelter and make important decisions.
- o Within the same tradition it is believed that after someone dies their spirit lives on. Descendants will "worship" their ancestors to ensure their good favour. On the anniversary of a person's death, ceremonies are held in their memory. They are also remembered during certain lunar festivals and souls are consulted prior to important decisions or occasions such as a birth or a wedding.

Face

- o As with many other Asian nations, the concept of face is extremely important to the Vietnamese.
- o Face is a tricky concept to explain but can be roughly described a quality that reflects a person's reputation, dignity, and prestige.
- o It is possible to lose face, save face or give face to another person.
- o Companies as well as individuals can have face or lose face.
- o For foreigners it is important to be aware that you may unintentionally cause a loss of face so it is important to be aware of your words and actions. Understanding how face is lost, saved or given is critical.
- o Someone can be given face by complimenting them for their hospitality or business acumen. Accusing someone of poor performance or reprimanding them publicly will lead to a loss of face.

Collectivism

- o In general, the Vietnamese are collectivists.
- o The individual is seen as secondary to the group - whether the family, school or company.
- o As a result there are strict guidelines for social interaction that are designed to protect a group's face

Hierarchy

- o As with most group-orientated societies there are also hierarchical structures.
- o In Vietnam these are very much based upon age and status.
- o This derives from Confucianism, which emphasizes social order. Everyone is seen as having a distinct place and role within the hierarchical structure, be it the family or workplace.
- o An obvious example is seen in social situations where the oldest person in a group is greeted or served first.
- o Within the family the head would be responsible for making decisions and approving marriages.